

# How The Shadow of the Stanford White Murder Has Pursued Evelyn Thaw

"Is There No Forgiveness for a Woman?  
Must I Go Through Life with the Stain of  
Harry Thaw and Stanford White  
Forever on My Forehead?"



WHEN the smoke from Harry Thaw's pistol, which ended the life of Stanford White fourteen years ago, cleared away there remained a cloud of scandal which hovered over the head of Evelyn Thaw and has followed her relentlessly like a curse ever since.

Whatever she has done, whichever way she turned, misfortune has overtaken her.

"Unfortunately," said Evelyn Thaw the other day, "I was born with a pretty face. This gave me honorable employment as a photographer's model, to be sure, but it also brought that human vulture into my life—Stanford White. Young, beautiful, unfamiliar with the ways of the world, I drifted along as the petted plaything of those two rich, influential, resourceful, worldly wise, sensual men—Stanford White and Harry Thaw. When my husband killed White that July evening on the Madison Square Roof Garden the dreamy illusions of my young life were instantly dispelled. I was only sixteen. I waked up to face a hard, cold, resentful world. I know now the meaning of the Bible truth that 'The wages of sin is death.'"

When, after two years of uncertainties, she was left to her own resources, with Harry Thaw definitely imprisoned in an asylum for the insane, Evelyn, stripped of every shred of that intangible thing known as a woman's "reputation," and stamped with the sins of White and the crimes of Thaw, started out to shape a new career for herself.

"I thought the world would forgive me and let me win myself into its confidence," she says, "if it saw that I intended to live down my girlhood's past and prove myself worthy of the regard anyone who tries to make an honest, industrious living deserves. But I was mistaken."

Just the other day Evelyn, now the divorced wife of Jack Clifford, the dancer, was compelled to drop out of the cast of a play in which she had been given the star's part because the audiences would not forget that she had been the sixteen-year-old girl who had been the plaything of Stanford White and for whom Harry Thaw had killed the architect. And those affairs had occurred fourteen years ago.

"The way of the transgressor is hard," says Evelyn, "but I do not think it ought to be filled with such stumbling blocks as have strewn my path since that day when the public at large first heard I existed—the morning after the murder on the Madison Square roof. I have honestly tried to 'make good' in the public eye. But whatever I do, wherever I go, whomever I love and whoever loves me—always the spectre of Stanford White and his studio and the swing in which he rocked me to thoughtlessness, and the shot fired by Harry Thaw and the gruel to which District Attorney Jerome subjected me—these things stare at me from every vantage point at every step I take to live down the past. There seems to be no mercy for me—no letting of bygones be bygones."

The play in which Evelyn was to be starred this season was a very good play, according to the critics who saw it and reviewed it. It opened in Washington, D. C., and was booked for a tour of the smaller cities of New York State, after which it was to open on Broadway for a metropolitan season.

The part assigned to Evelyn, who was announced on the programme simply as "Miss Nesbit," was that of a demure "little sister," whose faith and loyalty saved the hero from the snare laid for him. There was nothing in the part to suggest the young woman of the world such as Evelyn Thaw was at sixteen years of age. None of the lines or situations reminded the audience of her own past life. But those audiences did not seem to care for Evelyn Thaw in any sort of a part, even in a play which they enjoyed enthusiastically.

In Washington, when the play opened the newspapers spoke favorably of the play, but regretted that the name of Evelyn Nesbit appeared on the programme. In Harrisburg, Wilkesbarre and Ithaca, where the play went after its Washington engagement, the newspapers "regretted"

that the play was spoiled for its audiences by the haunting of the heroine of New York's most sordid criminal tragedy of fourteen years ago. At last, in Binghamton, N. Y., one of the newspapers said:

"Undoubtedly Miss Nesbit's name is used for no other reason than the hope that it will draw the curious. But her name failed to draw a large audience to the Opera House last night. Her part was by no means indispensable."

Realization that it was her name that was preventing people from coming to see the play caused Miss Nesbit to hastily resign and come back to New York—once more baffled in her effort to rehabilitate herself.

"It was just a new realization," she says, "must I go through life to the bitter end with the stain of Harry Thaw and Stanford White written indelibly forever on my forehead?"

Evelyn Thaw has turned her hand to many things since the famous tragedy fourteen years ago, but the curse of the old murder and its revelations has pursued her relentlessly.

Soon after the last trial of Harry Thaw she appeared in Paris as a dancer. She was widely heralded in the gay French capital and a large salary was paid to her, the amusement managers there believing that her appearance would be vastly profitable to them. At that time no name was better known, more notorious than hers.

After elaborate announcement she appeared at the Theatre Marigny. Her contract called for two weeks' engagement, the managers reserving an option for several additional weeks. But the two weeks were all. The spectators at the Theatre Marigny watched her dance with a painful lack of interest. The patronage dropped off. Even bohemian Paris would not accept her. Disappointed, she came back to the United States.

Not long after Evelyn attempted again to earn a career as a dancer on the vaudeville stage. She was widely advertised. Her "act" was like all other dancing entertainments in vaudeville—richly staged and impressive. There could be no doubt that she had trained herself well and that she was a far better dancer than many young women who make a successful profession of the art. But after only a few weeks she was forced to abandon the effort. Vaudeville theatre managers complained of the criticism to which they were subjected for presenting her to their audiences. Even in Pittsburgh, her girlhood home and also the home of the Thaw family, the theatre remained almost empty during the entire week of her appearance there.

"I wondered if there was not some place in the world where I would be given a chance to show that I was just a sorry, hopeful girl trying to do right," says Evelyn, "so I took my company to Canada. I opened at the Royal Alexandra Theatre in Toronto."

Here is what a Toronto newspaper said a few days later:

"Evelyn Nesbit Thaw's intended conquest of Canada has proved to be a frost-



Evelyn Thaw and Her Son, Russell Thaw, in Stage Costume.

bite. The management had to return a great deal of money to disgruntled patrons who wanted their money back."

A motion picture promoter believed that film audiences throughout the country would enjoy seeing Evelyn re-enact those early chapters in her life on the screen. He signed a contract with her, promising her a million dollars or more if she would appear before the camera. Here, thought Evelyn, was an opportunity to explain to the world just how sorry she was. She engaged special tutors and learned to act for the screen. But the picture never was exhibited. Theatre managers would not run the risk.

Other pictures in which she appeared had only short periods of success. In sev-

eral of the smaller cities throughout the United States the patrons of the movie theatres notified the theatre owners that they would not allow their daughters to patronize their theatre if they showed films in which Evelyn Thaw appeared, and so the pictures were withdrawn from the market. "And yet they were good pictures," said Evelyn, "such as any audience would enjoy—if they would only forget that I once had been a bad girl, the victim of cruel men."

A theatrical manager then thought it would be a stroke of good policy to send Mrs. Thaw out over the country in a play. Evelyn studied hard to learn the part. Those familiar with the stage who saw her rehearsals in New York declared that she had become an accomplished actress. But she met only tragedy. Now it was ten years after the Thaw-White scandal, yet a Catholic priest in Kansas City, Father Alexander W. Chapola, said from his pulpit the Sunday before the opening of the play in his city:

"Tomorrow a notorious woman comes to one of our theatres. I forbid any member of my parish attending the theatre at which she appears. If good men and women go to see her they only lend their approval to the kind of life this woman led."

In Knoxville, Tenn., the Church Federation ignored her pleas for "her chance" and issued a proclamation calling upon all good people to refrain from attending the theatre at which she was to appear. In Richmond, Va., Mayor Alsiee issued an order forbidding her to appear on the stage of that city when she arrived there with the play "Muriel." The Mayor said: "Mrs. Thaw's appearance would be an outrage to the sense of public decency." Evelyn defied the Mayor and went through her part at the Monday matinee. She was promptly arrested, charged with "unlawfully appearing on a public stage to the detriment of public morals and being a common nuisance to all the citizens of this commonwealth."



Mrs. Thaw as a Sculptress.

"How could I persuade people to forget my past and accept me as I tried to be—a good woman and a faithful mother—in the face of such cruelty as this?" asks Mrs. Thaw today.

After her early rebuffs on the stage Mrs. Thaw studied to be a sculptor. She had given promise of some talent along this line in her youth.

and Stanford White had amused himself by allowing her to play with clay in his studio in the Madison Square Garden tower. She soon recovered her skill and artists declared that she had even exceptional ability at modeling. She opened a studio in East Twenty-fourth street, in New York, and spent many months hard at work.

"But no one would buy them," says Mrs. Thaw. "I could not even persuade an art gallery to give me space for an exhibition. We would be glad to show them anonymously," the art dealers said to me, "for they really are very good and our customers will be delighted with them. But no one would think of buying them or of giving the artist a commission if they knew the sculptor was Evelyn Thaw."

"What could I do? When I was a very little girl I dreamed some day of making beautiful forms into bronze and marble to live forever as a memory of me. Now I had succeeded, after long hours of study and trials, in developing this talent, and before me stood figures that the art critics said were wonderfully good. But because they were done by Evelyn Thaw they must

Miss Evelyn Nesbit, Sweet-faced and Only Sixteen, in One of the Photographs Stanford White Posed. Copyright by Campbell Art Co.

be broken into bits and thrown away. I did not care for the money I would get by selling them anonymously. I wanted them to be known by my name—as a credit to the name two men had dragged into the mire. But this door closed to me and I went back to my other efforts."

It was then Mrs. Thaw met and loved Jack Clifford, formerly a jockey for King Edward, and who had become a vaudeville dancer of note. As Clifford's partner she again essayed vaudeville and the legitimate stage, but her seasons were short and successes few. Audiences would not receive her.

"And the shadow of the Madison Square Garden tragedy even fell over my first and only real romance," says Mrs. Thaw. "My husband could not shake it off. It sat with us at breakfast; it followed us into the street and into the theatre. He began to throw it up to me. It lured him away from me—it made happiness impossible between us. And so we were divorced and my only romance was broken."

"What can I ever do, how much more must I suffer, what atonement can I render unto the world to make it believe in me, trust me and forgive me?"